

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

## A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 191.—THIRD SERIES. SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 1892. PRICE TWOPENCE.

### MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

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#### CHAPTER XIII. NEWS FOR BRYANS.

THE artist stooped forward over his sketch, really to hide any sign of satisfaction at the Rector's words, seemingly to alter a touch here and there. He was still stooping over it while Mr. Cantillon walked to the fire, shook hands with Mr. Farrant, and sat down in his usual place opposite to him.

Geoffrey did not move or look up for the next minute or two. Maggie took her own little chair in the middle of the room, not sorry to sit at her ease and hold her head as she liked.

"Have you been walking far, Mr. Cantillon?" she said. "Are you too near the fire? I think it's an awfully hot day."

"Yes—no, not very," said the Rector, with unaccustomed vagueness.

It struck Geoffrey, through his other thoughts, that he had never heard a tone of voice in speaking quite like hers. It was low, only just above her breath, and strangely refined, and the sensation of it was like stroking a bird's feather or a piece of soft velvet. Her hair and eyes, the whole effect of her in fact, had this curious suggestion of softness. Feathers and velvet? Yes. But what was he touching now? Something more like red-hot iron, or ice unbearably cold.

"I have brought some news," the Rector began, with some slight hesitation in his words. He looked at the girl, away from the hawk-like eyes of the old man. He felt sorry for the half-developed

creature, about to lose—it was only too likely—the one good influence that was moulding her. He wished to say what he had to say as gently as possible, not at all knowing how Maggie would take it, and suddenly afraid of a scene. "But perhaps you have heard? Miss Latimer has written to you?"

"Poppy, do you mean? No!"

"She has not had time, of course," said Mr. Cantillon. "It was only settled, I think, two days ago."

He felt quite uncomfortable, and afraid of the sound of his own voice. He had the strongest, strangest impression that he was going to give a very serious shock. He thought that he had had no idea of the girl's extreme sensitiveness; and after all, what he saw in her attitude and her eyes was more like extreme curiosity.

"Do, do tell us!" she murmured. "Or shall I guess? Poppy is going to be married."

Mr. Cantillon bowed his head. He moved his lips in the form of "yes" but hardly pronounced the word, and there was a moment of dead silence. It was evident, however, that he need not have feared telling Maggie Farrant of this coming change in her friend's life. The girl was smiling, wondering, thinking; Heaven knows what visions of the future were flying through her ambitious young head. She looked anything but unhappy, and this being the case, the Rector was angry with his own nervousness, which continued in an unreasonable manner. Even his hand trembled as it lay on his knees.

"And who's the new Squire?" began the old man in the corner, in rasping tones. "Because half a loaf's a precious deal worse than no bread, let me tell you."

"I'll guess again," exclaimed Maggie, springing to her feet. "There, you know, grandfather, it can only be one person. Mr. Nugent, of course; the one that isn't married already. She said in her last letter what a nice large party they were. Am I right?"

"You are right, Miss Maggie," said the Rector, without any enthusiasm.

"Oh, it is wonderful news! What fun! I am glad, aren't you? Is he good enough for her? What is he like? Has anybody seen him? Mr. Thorne, of course. Oh, tell us, won't you?"

Geoffrey, who had till now been bending over his sketch, and effectually spoiling it with a number of new touches, got up and came forward.

"I can't, indeed. I hardly saw him," he said. "Good-bye, Miss Farrant. I must go—I—have remembered an engagement. Good-bye, Mr. Farrant. Good-bye, sir."

There was no remonstrating with such cool and resolute haste. Only the Rector, rising politely from his chair, looked with discerning, puzzled eyes into the young man's face, and thought of it afterwards. In another moment the door had closed behind him.

"For conceit and irritability, give me an artist," remarked Mr. Farrant. "If he and his confounded drawing are not the cynosure of neighbouring eyes the fat's in the fire on the spot. Let him go, Maggie. If he wants to finish your phiz, my dear, he'll come back. Well, now, Rector, about this new young man?"

"I am still more in the dark than Mr. Thorne," was the reply, "for I have never seen Captain Nugent. However, Miss Latimer seems pleased. His mother, Mrs. Nugent, is an old friend of hers."

"Ah! You mean Miss Fanny," said the old man.

With all the correctness of his ideas, it was always a vexation to the Rector that Fanny should have been dethroned when her niece grew up. It was right, he knew, that Porphyria should be the one and only Miss Latimer. He would have been angry with any one who had not given her her proper rank, and yet such a correction as old Farrant's was apt to make him more angry still. However, this anomaly, as it seemed to him, was not to last long now; and indeed he hoped the time was coming when there would be no such person as a Miss Latimer of Bryans.

Maggie went on with her soft chatter,

wondering this and wondering that, hoping for a letter soon, asking questions which the Rector could not answer. He very soon took his leave, saying to her with a smile, as she wished him good-bye in the passage:

"I quite think the next post will tell you all you want to know."

"Ah, yes; but I want much more than a letter," the girl said. "I want her, my sweet, beautiful Poppy. Mr. Cantillon, don't you think there is nobody like her in the whole world? I am not afraid Captain Nugent will make her forget me. You don't think he will, do you?"

"No, I don't think he will," the Rector said. "She is a noble person, with a constant nature."

He walked quickly away, turning his steps towards the Court avenue. One of the many things that grated on him at Bryans was to hear this girl talk of her friend, so immeasurably her superior, by her father's old pet name of Poppy. It was true that this name was more or less used by everybody who, from the Squire downwards, found Porphyria unpronounceable. He said it was indigestible, and never quite forgave his old friend for suggesting it. It suited her on her most inaccessible side, there was no doubt. After all, it hardly seemed a possible name on Maggie Farrant's lips; and it was Poppy's own fault if this girl called her by her Christian name at all.

But the Rector had not walked a dozen yards, turning the corner under the frowning wall of the old house, and going down the narrow, grass-grown lane, seldom traversed, which skirted the Court grounds on this side, before he had forgotten all about Maggie and her failings. In truth, he was thinking with deep interest of a newly discovered parishioner. It really seemed to him strange that he should have been so right, yet so mistaken. He had been wrong about the girl; his news was no shock at all to her. But no one who had ever observed human faces and human nature could have failed to notice the extraordinary change in that young man. Mr. Cantillon was rather given to sudden, almost feminine fancies about people, and the fact was that seldom during the course of his life at Bryans, or even in former days at Oxford, where young men were a daily study, had he seen a face that interested and pleased him as Geoffrey Thorne's did. He had seen frankness and simplicity in every line of it, and a simple-minded love

of art. He liked the way in which the bright dark eyes looked at him; he liked the strength and ease of the young fellow's figure and bearing. Fanny Latimer, writing from Herzheim a fortnight before, had mentioned him and his drawings in rather a casual, slighting way, with some remark, by no means original, on the smallness of the world. She had also said, however, that she hoped he might see something of him, and that he certainly was a credit to old Thorne of Sutton Bryans. The Rector did not often make that pilgrimage across the fields, and he did not find the Thornes an attractive family. But he had not forgotten, though in the depths of his heart he dreaded to meet a third-rate artist, not at all doubting Fanny's opinion on that subject.

It had been a relief and a surprise, that afternoon, to find that young Thorne was both manly and good-looking; that his drawing, too, was not to be despised—for the likeness of Maggie Farrant, as he had sketched it, was by no means a failure. But what occupied the Rector now was the young fellow's face as he said good-bye, the frown and stoop—evidently unconscious—with which he launched himself out of the room. His bright eyes were clouded, his clear brown skin looked almost grey. It was too plain to any one with eyes that the news of Miss Latimer's engagement was a tremendous shock to this unfortunate young man. The Rector was frowning now at the thought of it, as he walked along; he pursed up his lips and tapped the ground nervously with his stick.

"Poppy, Poppy, my dear, what have you been doing?" he said to himself. "I'm afraid we have a case here, do you know—a hopeless case. I am, indeed. Ah! there could not be a greater misfortune for a poor man. After all, the poor chap cannot be very wise. It is impossible that she should have given him any reason—intentionally, I mean. Quite impossible. There is nothing of Lady Clara Vere de Vere in Poppy—Heaven bless her! More likely that this fellow had made up a romance for himself—admiration of her beauty, and so forth. Dear me! He must be tolerably lonely at Sutton. No sympathy in that household, I fancy—too refined for his surroundings. Well, if I'm right, as I fear, he must get over it. And he will, for he's a manly fellow, with a good, sweet face. Never saw a face I liked better. Mr. Geoffrey Thorne, my

dear sir, I could wish you were in somebody else's shoes."

The next soliloquy was something like this:

"I wish I had known what I was doing—wasting my anxiety on that selfish little minx. Very odd, that I distinctly felt that there was something wrong—somebody to be hurt in the room. Never was so nervous in my life. Was it magnetism, or hypnotism, or thought-reading, or what? Something uncanny. However, he had to hear it from some one."

In the course of these thoughts and mutterings the Rector had turned in at a little green gate which led into a winding, mossy walk under spreading beech-trees, and they occupied him all the way through the soft flickering shade. The boughs above his head were here and there already starred with a few flame-coloured leaves, the first sparks of the great fire which in a few weeks more was to blaze all round Bryans. The path did not go directly towards the house, but sloped a little way from it, opening suddenly on the park from the beech-wood, not more than fifty yards above the grey stone bridge of one wide arch which broke the avenue here. On the opposite side of the river this avenue, all of stately beeches, led uphill in a straight line southward, till it came to the great iron gates, the gilded points and flourishes of which caught stray flashes of the sun. The full sunlight came pouring over the opposite woods, which were bronzed and gilded by it, straight into the Rector's eyes as he stood in a break of the trees. He was accustomed to linger at this point, finding that it had a peculiar beauty of its own; but to-day the light was too dazzling, and his mind was hardly free enough for the love of the trees to have its full power over him. He turned at once up that half of the avenue which mounted from the river, walking on the broad green sward, on which the rows of beeches stood back and apart in their stately dignity.

A short and rather steep hill ended in a ditch and a low wall, rising in the middle to high stone gate-posts with griffins sitting on them, and another pair of iron and gilded gates. These led into a flat square court gorgeous with flower-beds, with an old sundial in the middle of it, an ivied wall to the west, shutting out kitchen-gardens, and lovely slopes of green velvet turf to the east, with groups of trees and shrubs, and borders of roses,

leading on to a terraced flower-garden. The house stood on a high terrace above the court, with a double flight of steps, like those of a French house, leading up to it. The terrace sloped away to the court at both ends, and was wide enough for a carriage to drive up and turn.

The house itself had not the beauty of its gardens and its avenue. It was early Georgian, large, square, and built of stone. It looked both stately and comfortable; but there was nothing to break the lines of old-fashioned windows, or the brown-grey spaces of solid wall. It had been a tradition in the family that no ivy or other interlopers were to be allowed to grow on what was considered the best-built house in the county.

Most of the windows were shut up now, and the Rector glanced at them rather sadly, as he crossed the court, mounted the steps, and rang the bell at the front door. There was a chorus of barking from distant yards. He was let in immediately by Mrs. Arch herself, who from some commanding point had seen the slight, small figure coming up the hill, his hat shining, his coat-tails waving a little in a breeze which had sprung up, and the spot of bright colour in his buttonhole.

She received him politely, and asked him to come into the drawing-room; the garden windows were open, she said. But Mr. Cantillon disliked the drawing-room at all times, and he now preferred sitting down in the hall, which he liked even in an unfurnished state, for it had a very pretty marble floor in patterns of black and white, and some beautiful old wood-carving over the chimney-piece.

Mrs. Arch was a tall and large woman, with an immovable face which generally frightened strangers. In spite of being the most faithful of servants and the most high-principled of women, she was by no means a general favourite. Even the Rector did not love Mrs. Arch, for she was not a very good churchwoman, and with all his tolerant gentleness, his opinions on some points were strong. Her influence was very great, both at the Court and in the village, and it was not always used in an orthodox direction. Poppy's father used to call her "the arch-everything," and Poppy herself revived the old joke sometimes, saying that nothing could be done at Bryans without her knowledge and consent. It seemed a responsible post to bring such news to such a woman, and the Rector felt himself

hardly prepared with the right thing to say. He need not, however, have worried himself at all on the subject. Looking anxiously at Mrs. Arch, he saw that her eyes were red and shining, and that her whole large face trembled between a smile and a sob.

"Mrs. Arch," he said, "I came here to tell you something. Miss Frances asked me to tell you—but now I cannot help thinking that you know it already."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Arch, "please to think whether it's likely that my young lady would let me hear such news from any one but herself."

"No, certainly it is not. Then she has written to you?"

"I had a letter this morning." The housekeeper held it up before him. "I've mentioned it to no one, for these things they do get spread so that lightning is nothing to it. Russian scandal, sir, as I heard you call it one day. English scandal is just as bad to my mind, or rather worse. But I suppose there is no reason why all Bryans shouldn't know."

"On the contrary," said Mr. Cantillon. "I was asked to tell the principal people, and so I came to you. Do sit down, Mrs. Arch; this is very wonderful news, and I should like to hear how you feel about it."

"Thank you, sir, I'm not one to talk about my feelings. I mostly keep things to myself and don't show nothing outwardly. But I must confess that to-day I've had no rest and been able to settle down to nothing. Dear Miss Poppy knew I should be upset, and no doubt she thought my old heart would set itself to fearing all kinds of changes. So she says, 'Never mind, dear old Arch.' I can't show you her letter, sir, if you'll excuse me—no human eyes shall see it except my own—but she says Captain Nugent will only be a new friend for me, and I'm still to be arch-cook and arch-housemaid, and——"

The housekeeper bowed her face upon Poppy's letter and burst into sobs and tears. They lasted for some time, though now and then she lifted up her head to pour out blessings on Poppy, and prayers that she might be happy in her future life. Her face was very grotesque at these moments, and the Rector tried hard not to look at her. He did not really feel inclined to laugh at the poor woman. It touched him, indeed, to see the stern and immovable Arch so affected, and he was even conscious of a little sympathetic feel-



ing about his own throat and eyes. He waited very patiently, tracing careful patterns with his stick upon the floor. At last Mrs. Arch was able to speak again, and she began in a deeply lugubrious tone.

"It's not that I fear any change, sir, as I'm sure you understand. Besides, a new master never is the same as a new mistress. If Miss Poppy was a young gentleman, going to bring home a new young lady, then we old servants might shake in our shoes and nobody have a right to blame us. It's not that. It's only that every change is a trial, and men do deceive so, begging your pardon, that I can't help feeling the risk she will be running. She, the most innocent, unsuspecting, unable to think evil—scarce perhaps knowing it when she sees it—and Lord bless you, to have only known him a fortnight! Don't it seem to you alarming, sir? But perhaps you know something about him?"

"I only know that Miss Frances has known his family for years, and that his mother is a great friend of hers. That is a recommendation," said the Rector cheerfully, if not quite honestly. "I have never seen the young man himself. I knew his brother a little, but—well, I believe they are not at all alike. I have no reason to think otherwise than well of Captain Nugent. We can hardly dare hope, perhaps, that we shall think him quite worthy of her. But we must trust her discernment, Mrs. Arch. Her friends are generally the right sort of people—don't you think so?"

He stretched out his hand for his hat, feeling impatient to be gone. A gasp from Mrs. Arch made him fear another fit of crying.

"Well, as to that, I don't know," she said dismally.

And the Rector, considering his words, was not sure that he knew either.

After all, he lingered for a long time at the door in the sunshine, talking to Mrs. Arch so kindly, with such thorough sympathy, that they were better friends for ever afterwards.

"There, let us hope for the best," he said, as he shook hands with her. "Take my advice: have an extra good cup of tea and go to bed early. You will want all your energies soon, remember."

Mrs. Arch smiled—a rare performance with her—and stood looking after him, tears running down her face now and then, till he was lost to sight in the shade of the avenue.

## A HORNED PEOPLE.

TOWARDS the Burmese borders of China, but yet within the nominal area of the great province of Szechuan, is a tract of about eleven thousand square miles of almost unknown country, inhabited by a curious people, whose origin and history are totally unknown. The Chinese name of this territory is Liang-Shan—the Great Ridge Mountains—but it is familiarly called by travellers Lolodom. It is peopled by the independent Lolos, of whom one frequently finds mention in books of travel in Western China, but little or nothing in the way of description. Marco Polo seems to have passed its borders in traversing what he calls the district of Cain-du, described as a fertile country containing many towns and villages, and inhabited by "a very immoral population." But no one enters Lolodom without a special permit from the Lolos.

Their land is framed in by mountains, through which a deep gully leads from the Chinese Prefecture of Chien-Chang—Marco Polo's Cain-du. The passage of this gully is barred by a river, which no Chinaman is allowed to cross until he finds bail for his good conduct in Lolodom. The Lolos themselves swim or wade across, and swing themselves up the opposite bank by means of a rope. The Chinese traders, who go into the country with proper protection, are said to make great profits there, the Lolos being simple and conscientious, but very resentful of trickery and bad faith.

No European traveller has seen so much of, and has gathered so much information about the Lolos as Mr. Colborne Baber; but unfortunately his extremely interesting notes are buried from the general reader among the Supplementary Papers of the Royal Geographical Society. To these notes we are largely indebted in the preparation of this article.

Whence the Lolos came and when, no man knows; but as it has been discovered that they have a written language of their own, it is possible that some solution of the mystery may be found hereafter. The name "Lolo" itself is of unknown Chinese origin, and is a term of insult which the Lolos do not recognise. They call themselves variously "Lo-su," "No-su," and "Le-su," or generically "I-chia"—namely, tribes or families of I. They are not an autonomous people, and their tribes

seem to be frequently at variance with each other.

They are a tall and well-made race—far taller than the Chinese, and than any European people. Mr. Baber saw hundreds of them, but never one who could be called under-sized. They are slim and muscular, with the deep chests of natural mountaineers—indeed, their speed and endurance in mountain-climbing is a proverb among the Chinese. They have handsome oval faces of a reddish-brown hue, prominent cheek-bones, arched and rather broad noses, thinnish lips, large eyes, and pointed chins, from which the beard is carefully plucked. A curious characteristic is a tendency to wrinkles, especially on the forehead.

The great marked physical peculiarity of the Lolo, however, is the horn. Each male adult gathers his hair into a knot over his forehead, and then twists it up in a cotton cloth so as to resemble the horn of a unicorn. This horn, which is sometimes as much as nine inches long, is regarded as sacred, and even when a Lolo, on settling in Chinese territory, grows a pigtail, he still carefully preserves his horn under his head-cover.

The women are remarkably graceful, and as modest in their demeanour as the Sifan tribes—the immoral people referred to by Marco Polo—are the reverse. The young ones are described as "joyous, timid, natural, open-aired, neatly dressed, bare-footed, honest girls, devoid of all the prurient mock-modesty of the club-footed Chinese women—damsels with whom one would like to be on brotherly terms.

Mr. Baber gives a pleasant picture of them: "Several of them, natives of the vicinity of Yuch-hsi, came to peep at me in the verandah of the inn, their arms twined round one another's necks; tall, graceful creatures, with faces much whiter than their brothers. They did not understand Chinese, and scampered away when I made bold to address them. But a sturdy Lolo lord of creation, six feet two high, whose goodwill I had engaged by simple words, went out and fetched two armfuls of them—about half-a-dozen. It would have been unkind to presume upon this rather constrained introduction, especially as they were too timid to speak, so I dismissed the fair audience with all decorous expedition. Their hair was twined into two tails and wound round their heads; they wore jackets, and flounced and pleated petticoats, covered

with an apron, and reaching to the ground."

The principal garment of a Lolo man is a capacious sleeveless mantle of grey or black felt, tied round the neck and falling nearly to the heels. The richer Lolos have this mantle of a very fine felt, highly esteemed by the Chinese, with a fringe of cotton web round the lower border. On horseback they wear a cloak of similar material split half-way up the back, and a lappet to cover the opening. In summer, cotton is sometimes substituted for felt as material for the mantle and cloak. The trousers are of Chinese cotton, with felt bandages. The Lolo wears no shoes, but for head-covering he has a low conical hat of woven bamboo, covered with felt, which serves also as an umbrella. Thus incased in felt, he is proof against both wind and rain.

There appear to be two broad classes of Lolos, called respectively—in Chinese equivalents—"Black-bones," and "White-bones." The former name is used by the Chinese to indicate the independent tribes—as distinguished from those on the frontiers, more or less subject to the Imperial Government—but among the Lolos themselves a Black-bone is a noble, and the word is thus somewhat analogous to our own "blue blood." The White-bones are the plebeians, the vassals and retainers of the Black-bones. A third class exists in Lolodom, called "Wa-tzu," who are practically slaves—captive Chinese and their descendants. It is said that those born in Lolodom are treated with more consideration than those brought in by fresh forays. Some who have escaped have admitted that they were not unkindly treated, and were not overworked. The captives are tattooed on the forehead with the mark of the tribe, and if they are recalcitrant are flogged with nettles, but when docile are made comfortable, and their children are admitted to all the privileges of Lolo children.

There is, however, no intermarriage. No Lolo will marry except with a woman of his own tribe, and although Chinese women are sometimes captured, they are taken as wives for Chinese bondmen, not for Lolos.

The marriage of a Black-bone is a time of high festivity, with *al fresco* banquets. When the feast is over the bride goes home with her friends, but it is only after a third banquet that the marriage takes place. An interchange of presents then follows, and

the betrothal is ratified by the present from the husband's to the bride's family of a pig and three vessels of wine. On the wedding morning the friends of the bride gather round her, and the bridesmaids chant a song somewhat to this effect:

"In spite of all the affection and care your fond parents have lavished upon you since the day you were born, you must now desert them. Never again will you sit beside them at work or at meals. You will not be nigh to support them when they grow old, nor to tend them when they fall sick. You must leave them and go away to the house of a stranger."

To this dispiriting theme the bride chants, as well as her tears will allow:

"Leave them I must, but not by my desire or fault. They must bear with my absence; my brothers and sisters will support them. I go to my husband, and my duty will be to help his parents, not alas! my own. But if any trouble befall my dear father and mother, I shall pine to death; I am sure I shall. Seldom can I visit them; but when they are sick let them send for me and I will come—I will come!"

The strain may be varied and indefinitely prolonged, but the theme is the same—the sorrow of leave-taking and filial affection. Then the bride is dressed in rich garments and ornaments, and a new song is raised, the theme of which is fear that the bridegroom and his friends may not be kind to the departing loved one. Weeping is plentiful, till the tide of sorrow is checked by the arrival of the groom's male relatives and friends, who dash into the throng, seize the bride, place her on the shoulders of the "best man," carry her out of doors, clap her on horseback, and then gallop off with her to her new home.

Meanwhile, the bridesmaids and their friends make a feint of detaining her, and belabour the attacking party with thorn-branches, or smother them in showers of flour and wood-ashes. Arrived at her new home, the bride finds a house, horses, cattle and sheep provided by the groom's family, while her own parents send clothes, ornaments, and corn. The Lolos, it is said, live in good stone houses, and have fine broad roads between their villages.

A queer marriage ceremony is reported of some of the tribes, but whether a serious one or only part of the fun of the event does not appear. The parents of the bride place her on an upper branch of some

large tree, while the older ladies of the family are perched on the lower branches. The bridegroom has to climb up the trunk for his bride, and she does not become his until he touches her foot, an act which the women endeavour, or profess to endeavour, to prevent, by striking at him and shoving him in all directions.

The birth of a girl is regarded as a more fortuitous event than the arrival of a boy—proof that the women occupy a high position among the Lolos. Indeed, a woman-chief is not unknown among the tribes.

Mr. Baber advises any one who would enter the Lolo country to secure a female guide, under whose protection his person and property will be held sacred. Such a guide will put on an extra petticoat before beginning the journey, and if any molestation is threatened, will take off that garment and spread it solemnly on the ground. There it will remain until the outrage has been condoned, and the ground on which it lies is inviolable until the neighbouring chiefs have punished the offenders and done justice to the convoy.

The women also take part in battles, but are not assailed by male warriors so long as they do not use cutting weapons.

When a boy is born he is first washed in cold water, and then baptized on the forehead with cow-dung, to make him strong and courageous.

The Lolos are not Buddhists, and it is not easy to classify their religion. It is dominated by medicine-men, who are also the scribes, and who are held in great reverence. The deities are consulted by throwing sticks in the air and noting the positions in which they fall, or by burning bones and drawing auguries from the marks produced by calcination. To avert evil influences, feathers inserted in a split bamboo are put on the roof of a house, much like the old horse-shoe on the barn-door in our own country. When a disaster is threatened, sheep or cattle are slaughtered as a sort of propitiatory sacrifice.

They have also trial by ordeal in a curious fashion. If anything has been stolen, and the thief has not been discovered, all the people of the place are summoned by the medicine-man and compelled each to masticate a handful of raw rice. When the mess is ejected, a stain of blood on the mouthful betrays the delinquent, as the gums of the guilty are sure to bleed!

The Lolos compare the world to an open hand. The thumb, well stretched out, represents foreigners; the forefinger, themselves; the middle finger, the Mohammedans; the third finger, the Chinese; and the little finger the Tartars. They seem to have three deities—Lui-wo, A-pu-ko, and Shua-shê-pc—but we are ignorant of the attributes of each. They all dwell in the sacred Mount of the Buddhists, however, Mount O-mi, which is curious, and the greatest of the three is Lui-wo.

They say that they get woollen cloths from Chien-Chang, and other goods from "beyond Thibet"—query, Russia. They have a tradition of a European who visited them some fifty years ago. This was probably a French missionary. Another Frenchman was captured during a Lolo foray near Yurg-Shan, in 1860. He recorded his dismal experiences in the "*Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*." Only he speaks of his captors as Mantzu, and as very rough customers indeed.

Mr. Baber says that the free-hearted manner of the Lolos is very attractive, and that they are inclined to regard Europeans as distant kinsmen. He is satisfied that a European could travel from end to end of Lolodom with perfect security, if only he was furnished with the proper credentials. A strict watch is kept all along the frontiers, and all suspicious persons are rigorously excluded.

The Lolos get the blame of many outrages which are really committed by bands of Chinese outlaws which infest the borders of Lolodom. But they do make periodical forays in a very determined manner. When they project an invasion of Chinese territory, after the manner of the Scottish Borderers, the Black-bones send heralds some months in advance to announce their intention. The Chinese officials never molest these emissaries, as they know that terrible reprisals would follow, but take the hint and remove themselves to a safe distance.

When the time comes—usually in early winter—the Lolo warriors issue forth, cross the Gold River in light coracles—all they carry with them—and proceed to lay hands on what goods and chattels they can find. They do not kill anybody who submits and offers to provide a ransom, nor do they make captives of old persons; but young men and women, cattle and salt, they carry off wholesale, and if resistance is offered they destroy all the growing crops. Resistance, however, is seldom offered by the

country people, and the Chinese guard are usually like the proverbial policeman when a row occurs.

The Lolos do not use firearms, but cross-bows and long twenty-four foot spears headed with spikes four or five inches long. The prisoners may be ransomed, but the price is a higher one than the ordinary country folk can raise. Mr. Baber met a woman who had been ransomed for the equivalent of five pounds—a terribly large sum in those parts. The captives, as a rule, remain as slaves; and it marks a curious condition of affairs in the great Chinese Empire that, within the nominal boundaries of one of its largest and richest provinces, thousands of its subjects live at the mercy of a nation of slave hunters. The frontiers, at almost any point of which the slave hunts may take place, extend for quite three hundred miles within the area of China proper.

The Lolos certainly possess books, and Mr. Baber was able to procure transcripts of some of their writings. They have not yet been interpreted, we believe; but the characters have been identified as phonetic, and as bearing some affinities to writings found in Sumatra.

It should be mentioned that the term Lé-su, or a variant of it, is frequently found among Indo-China tribes, widely separated from each other by distance and everything else. The Abbé Desgodins refers to a people he calls "Lissou," inhabiting the country immediately to the south of Thibet, speaking a language quite different from the surrounding tribes, and having a very independent character. In the journal of the Sladen Mission there is mention of a people called Lee-saus, who are supposed to be identical with the Leisu encountered on the Thibetan borders. And a great similarity has been shown between the language of those Lee-saus and the Burmese.

Is it possible that there is any connection between the Lolos and the Burmese tribes by Karens, who have so mysterious a history, and whose legends seem to point almost to a European origin? This is a matter for ethnologists to investigate; but it is clear that a great deal more information is needed about the remarkable inhabitants of Lolodom, of whom we have endeavoured to present a sketch from the very scanty materials available.

Mr. Hosié, who encountered some Lolos on his journey in Western China, says that the women might, without any stretch of



imagination, have been taken for Italian peasant women. He also saw the place, near Yueh-hsi, where, a few years ago, a Chinese army of five thousand men had entered Lolodom to punish the Black-bones and possess the land; but not a man of them ever returned! Truly Lolodom enshrines a great human mystery.

## THE BEND OF THE ROAD.

### A COMPLETE STORY.

AN old man leaning over a gate at sunset. In the background a farmhouse and buildings surrounded by meadows; in the foreground a white, dusty, country road.

This was the picture presented to my eye—the picture round which the story is written.

He was a tall old man, and his frame, bent as it was, must have been exceptionally powerful in its day; but now there was an appearance of weakness pervading the entire personality. The hand that clutched the gate-post was a feeble one; the face, with its look of patient expectancy, was very wan and drawn, though it might be more by sickness than age, and the eyes that were bent upon the winding road before them were dim as though the light were fast departing from them.

His eyes were bent upon the road, the dusty whiteness of which was unsullied except by the presence of my own sombre, travel-stained figure, for I was on my way to the village which lay beyond, round the bend of the road, but there was something in the solitary form before me that caused me to slacken my pace until I was almost at a standstill.

I noticed that the old man's weak gaze seemed to be fixed upon just this same bend of the road, and from something in his attitude and expression I judged him to be waiting for some one whom he expected to come from this direction. In accordance with the custom of the country I wished him "good evening."

He answered back in a weak, quavering voice, which seemed little in accordance with the massive frame to which it belonged.

"Good evenin' to ye, sir."

I was about to hazard some other remark—such as it being fine weather for the crops—when the old man suddenly became violently agitated. His gaze,

which, for a brief instant while I spoke, had been diverted from that particular spot upon which it had been fixed, returned thither, and was now riveted upon some approaching object which, though some distance off, was yet perceptible even to his dimmed vision.

"Look, Maggy, look!" he cried, in trembling eagerness, "see ther, at th' bend o' th' road! I can see summat red like."

And he pointed with a shaking finger.

I have spoken of the old man's solitary figure—and so it had at first appeared—but now, as he uttered these words, I was aware of that of a woman a little way behind him, which I had previously overlooked. She now came forward, and bending over the gate beside the old man looked down the road. She was young—quite a girl—and her face, so far as I could see it under the penthouse of sun-bonnet, was pretty after a pale, pathetic style, but from something in her dress and manner I judged her to be somewhat lower in station than the old man. The hand with which she shaded her eyes as she looked down the road was red and roughened by hard work, and yet in her eyes I thought I saw the same expression of patient waiting and expectancy which I had read in those of him who had addressed her as "Maggy."

"Look, Maggy, look!" the latter cried again. "It's comin' nearer. Is it some'un in a red coat, think ye?"

And his excitement was so great that he was obliged to cling to the gate-post for support.

The young woman gazed for a moment down the road, and the hand that shaded her eyes from the rays of the setting sun trembled. Then she turned to the old man, and I fancied I heard the ghost of a sigh as she answered him, as one would answer a child.

"No, daddy, no, not this time. 'Tis only Farmer Drake's wife in her red shawl drivin' home from market."

The old man's excitement died out as rapidly as it had kindled, and his face took upon it its former look of pathetic patience as he quavered out:

"Ay, Maggy, lass, ye're right, ye're allers right; but he's sure to come soon. If not to-day, to-morrer or maybe next day."

Then his eyes fell upon me again, as, impelled by some feeling of mingled sympathy and curiosity evoked by the little

scene I had just witnessed, I had lingered by the gate.

"We're a-watchin' fur our Joe," he explained with a feeble smile as he uttered the name. "He's bin in furrin parts but he's comin' home now; eh, Maggy?"

"Yes, daddy," she answered, with a faint smile like his own, and a note of cheerfulness—feigned or otherwise—in her voice, "he's comin' home—soon."

I bade them both, the old man and—for so I judged her to be by her addressing him as "daddy"—his daughter, "good evening," and left them. Before I had gone far I encountered the very woman in the red shawl, the delusive appearance of which had, it appeared, raised false hopes in at least one breast. She was driving a cart from which came the cackle of poultry, and presented a perfect embodiment of rural prosperity; and yet I felt, vaguely, that I owed her a grudge for being herself instead of some one else.

When I, too, reached the bend of the road, round which the village lay, I looked back.

The sun had gone down and a coldness had fallen upon the landscape, but I fancied that I could still see the two waiting figures at the gate.

I remained some days at the village and made the acquaintance of the clergyman, who owned the living and preached two sermons per week to a drowsy and limited congregation in an old, old church, the date of which was not known to a century or so. One day I met him coming out of the very same gate over which I had seen the old man leaning while he looked down the road. Without any enquiry on my part he at once began to tell me the latter's simple story.

"I have been to see old Farmer Brett," he began, as he turned and walked with me. "At least, he is not so old in actual years, perhaps, though he has aged wonderfully since his son went away."

"His son Joe?" I questioned.

"You know him, then?"

"No," I answered; "that is—go on."

"Well, you must know his wife died some years back, and he had only this one son, Joe—a fine young fellow, over six feet, and as strong as a giant, but rather harum-scarum. There was not a bit of harm in him, though, and he was a favourite with everybody. Somehow he and his father could not hit it off together. Old Brett was rather a hard man—yes" (I suppose I had given some indication of surprise), "you would

not think it to see him now, but then he is only a wreck of his former self, and is changed in many ways—indeed, he is hardly the same man. Well, it had been his father's expressed determination, ever since Joe was a youth, that he should marry his cousin, who, when her father died, would inherit a good bit of property. All went smoothly enough at first, and it seemed that old Brett's wish was in a fair way of being accomplished, when, what does the young fellow do but fall in love, in his usual headlong, reckless manner, with the daughter of one of his father's labourers. Maggy Dale was a good girl and superior to her class, but, of course, it would be a terribly bad marriage from old Brett's point of view.

"I believe there was a terrible scene between father and son when it came to the former's ears. It ended, at any rate, in the old man ordering the young one either to give up all thought of the girl, or leave the house then and there. Joe Brett took his father at his word, left his home that very night, and has never re-entered it since.

"Weeks went by and nothing was heard of him, and his father, who had soon repented of his harshness, sought news of him in vain. At last a letter came. Joe Brett had enlisted in a regiment which was ordered on foreign service, and the letter was actually written on shipboard. In it he implored his father to forgive him, said that he would never give up Maggy, but there was a prospect of hard fighting before him, and, perhaps, when he returned, his father might have reason to be proud of him and take back some of the cruel words he had thrown at him."

The Vicar paused.

"Then that was the girl I took to be the old man's daughter since she called him daddy?"

"Yes, that is the most pathetic part of it. When the father realised that his son had gone from him, perhaps to meet his death, it brought on a fit of some kind which was followed by a long illness, which changed him from the fine stalwart man of middle age to the wreck he now is—broken in health and spirit and with but one great longing, to see his son once more, and one source of comfort, the companionship of the girl for whose sake he drove him from his door."

I told him of the scene I had myself witnessed.

"Ah, yes," was the reply, "every even-

ing, as the sun goes down, those two stand together and look down the road along which one day they hope to see the wanderer returning; for I must tell you that the regiment has been ordered home, and it is not without reason that the old man watches at the gate."

He paused for a moment before continuing.

"Only I hope if he does come he will come soon, for I fear the old man's strength is falling fast."

After this I always contrived to pass by the farmhouse at least once in the course of the day, generally towards sunset, when I was sure to see the old man and the girl, in both of whom I now began to take a strong interest, waiting at the gate. They were always standing in the same attitude and looking in the same direction, and the old man's eyes would be strained to catch the first glimpse of any approaching figure as it came into view round the bend of the road.

We used to exchange greetings, and always the old man would inform me in his feeble tones that they were looking out for "their Joe."

Sometimes, too, he would indulge in a few details.

"Our Joe, he's bin in furrin parts a-fightin' fur th' Queen. Oh, yes, he were allers a darin' one, were Joe. I mind him when he were but a bit o' a lad, he'd think nowt o' standin' up to one twice his own size. He never knowed what fear were, didn't our Joe. Ah, I guess they ain't got many like him, an' when he comes home he'll be showin' us th' medals he'll a-won, fur he were allers a famous hard hitter, an' I make no doubt he'll a-done his dooty fur his Queen an' country, an' we'll all be proud o' him, won't us, Maggy?"

It was touching to see how he always turned to the girl he had once scorned and scouted for confirmation and sympathy in everything that related to the absent one, and how he invariably recognised and proclaimed her rights by referring to him as "our Joe."

But each day that passed seemed to leave him feebler than the last, and after a time a chair had to be brought out and placed for him at the gate, where he could sit and watch the road. One evening, I remember it well, I found him sitting there, his face still turned in the old direction, and his eyes strained to catch sight of the red coat in which he fondly hoped to see his son attired, "with his sword by his side, an'

his medals on his breast, an' maybe th' boys from th' village cheerin' him."

I stopped as usual to talk with him. He struck me as looking very frail, and, with something like a pang, it was borne in upon me that unless the longed-for meeting occurred very shortly, it would never take place at all in this world. However, he was unusually hopeful. To-morrow, he told me, would be Joe's birthday. No doubt he would come to-morrow. He was—"let's see, how old is he?" And he turned to Maggy.

"Twenty-seven, daddy," she answered.

"Ay, ay, to be sure, so he were, though it were wonderful how he'd shot up. Seemed but yesterday as he were a bit o' a boy, playin' truant from school to go birdsnestin' or blackberryin'. Ah, he were a limb, were Joe."

I looked at Maggy. Did she, too, entertain the hope that he would come on his birthday? If so, how was it that she looked so pale and sad? Did she find the waiting too long? Had hope deferred made her heart sick?

But the old man was speaking.

"P'raps ye'll drop in to-morrer, sir, an' see Joe? I make no doubt as he'll be here, an' I shall be up fine an' early to meet him. Maggy, too, must put on her Sunday gown, an' look her bonniest, eh, Maggy? Ye'll be wantin' to show our Joe what a fine young woman you've growed while he's bin away?"

"Yes, daddy," she answered, with the ghost of a smile flickering for an instant across her features, and then dying out.

Next morning early I was aware of a sense of commotion and pleasurable excitement abroad in the village. Little groups gathered in the roadway, and busy housewives, appearing in their doorways, shouted the tidings to each other across the street.

"Hast heard th' news? Joe Brett's come home. Maggy Dale heard stones throwed at her winder this mornin' when 'twas hardly light, an' looked out, an' there he were, with his red coat an' all, an' he waved his hand an' pointed to his father's house, as much as to say he were goin' there, an' she'd see him agen later."

It was about sundown when I passed the gate where the old man used to stand and look down the road. There was no one there now, and I easily imagined to myself the happy little group assembled together in the old homestead. I thought me of the old man's invitation to

drop in and see "our Joe." It seemed rather too soon to intrude upon them, but after a moment's hesitation I opened the gate.

"No doubt," I thought, "I shall find the young fellow no better and no worse than others of his class; but I am glad—I am very glad he has come in time, for I fear his father is going fast."

I found the door of the house ajar, and as I paused for a moment on the threshold I heard the old man's voice speaking within. The tone itself would almost have acquainted me with the good news even had it not been the common talk of the village.

"Eh, lad, but I thought as ye'd come on yer birthday—with yer red coat and yer medals, too, so grand like. But ye're only jest in time, Joe, ye're only jest in time; fur I'm goin' fast, though I can die in peace now as I've seed ye once more an' know as ye've forgave yer old father th' hard part as he acted to'ards ye."

Not willing to remain longer an involuntary eavesdropper, I pushed open the door and entered. The old man was sitting in his elbow-chair facing me. The waning light from the window at his side fell upon his face, showing it almost wax-like in its pallor, and yet irradiated by an expression of the deepest joy I had ever seen on any human countenance. Behind him, half in the shadow, was the girl Maggy. Her face was as pale as the old man's; her lips were parted, and her hands clasped convulsively as she listened to the words that fell from him. So silent and motionless was she that she appeared more like a statue than a living being.

There was no one else in the room!

Meanwhile, the old man still went on speaking.

"It would a' bin a dreadful disappointment if ye hadn't a' come to-day. Maggy an' me's bin lookin' out fur ye so long. There's never hardly bin a night as we haven't watched fur ye from th' gate, fur we knowed as ye'd come from th' village an' round th' bend o' th' road, an' we wanted to be th' fust to see ye. An' to think as ye should a' took us by surprise arter all!"

He broke off and began to pass his trembling hand up and down and round about as though feeling for something before him.

"An' it's fine ye look in yer red coat an' all. Eh, but ye'll be turnin' all th'

girls' heads an' makin' Maggy jealous;" and he laughed a feeble little laugh.

But the girl behind him uttered no word, only clasped her hands tighter, while her face gleamed ghost-like in the shadow. Neither of them took any heed of my presence; the old man, I was sure, had not even observed it. I longed to withdraw, and yet feared to disturb them by a movement. Then I heard a foot crunching the path outside. The sound released me from the spell that held me to the spot, and I turned and left the room.

As I softly closed the door I saw the Vicar coming towards me. He held a letter in his hand, and looked troubled.

"I have bad news here," he said, "very bad news. Joe Brett is dead. He died on the voyage home. This is a letter asking me to break the news to his father. However shall I do it?"

"There is no need," I said.

The old man died at daybreak. Those who were present spoke with awe of the unseen presence, visible only to the father's eye, that hovered round the deathbed. He passed away peacefully, even happily, for he went down into the Valley of Shadows hand in hand with "our Joe."

His last words were to the girl who had been wont to watch with him at the gate.

"Maggy," he whispered, "we'll wait fur ye—Joe an' me—an' we'll see ye comin' round th' bend o' th' road."

## CHARLES KEENE.

### IN TWO PARTS. PART II.

"SIR, the man who writes, except it be for money, is a fool."

A great writer has been credited with this mercenary maxim, and it would seem to have some influence on modern correspondents.

We live in a fast-going age, and spare but little time for letter-writing. Our great grandfathers exchanged enormous foolscap sheets to testify their friendship, and no small sums were paid for their postage. Nowadays we take to "wiring" one another to save the pains of writing, and scarce ever use the post except for purposes of business. A few old fogies may survive in some outlandish nooks and corners, who still perhaps are not inconstant correspondents. But the young men of the period as little dream of writing letters as they would of wearing pigtails or of taking snuff.



Biographers in future will have little need to hunt for the letters of their heroes. A telegram or two, and some half-a-dozen postcards, perhaps, may be discoverable; but as for finding any letters, the lost books of Livy will as easily be found.

Old-fashioned as he was, and fond of ancient customs, it is not surprising that Keene, when far away from them, should write to his old friends, and many of his letters have been luckily preserved. Of these nearly a hundred have been added to his Life; and although a captious critic may object to small-beer chronicles, there are reasons for approving this addition to the book. Keene, though rather shy and silent in society, and preferring usually to listen than to speak, grew chatty and amusing when he put his thoughts on paper, and would let his pen say freely what might not have passed his lips. Thus his letters give a clearer mental portrait of the man than might have been furnished by any other means; and they are, moreover, very pleasant reading, being natural and simple; scribbled off "currente calamo," and not written for effect. The reader must not look for the elegance of Chesterfield, or the gossiping of Horace Walpole, or the drollery of Charles Lamb, or the brilliance of Byron, or the piety of Cowper, or the poetry of Keats. But these letters have a certain charm and freshness of their own; and many as there are, we may wish that there were more.

Neither books nor letters can be fairly judged from extracts; still we may make a dip or two haphazard in the postbag, which, though private for a while, lies open now before us. Here are a few words from Witley, Surrey, where, in the year '65, Keene rented a small cottage from his friend Birket Foster.

"This is a pleasant retreat to fly to for a day or two from the row and turmoil of London, and gives my friends, too, the opportunity of calling it my 'country house,' and the pleasure of making me wince by hinting at the wealth that enables me to afford such a luxury!

"It's a bosky-copsey country, very picturesque and English, with just a suggestion (compared to Scotland) of hills on the horizon (the Hog's Back), but from there being so many trees, when the glass does fall the rain comes down with a vengeance. Last night there was a furious gale, which kept everybody awake but me. My couch is a hammock, which wraps round me so comfortably, it's like

'poppies and mandragora.' We've a small aristocracy of artists, too, down here—Birket Foster, Burton, Watson, and Jones—and amongst our surroundings there's a good deal of fun to be picked up. That reminds me of an extract from a catalogue of a country auction down here the other day. Among the books were these two lots:

"No. 20.—Mill on Liberty.

"No. 21.—D.D. on The Floss!

"They have their 'girds' at us, too. I heard of a Belle of the nearest town remarking of the curious manners and customs of these artists, that she had actually seen them in Society in evening dress up to the waist, and a velvet jerkin and any-coloured necktie a-top!"

Charles Keene, like John Keats, very rarely dated letters; though he sometimes marked the week-day whereon they were written, and would often add a drawing, which was better than a date. Here is, however, a morsel of a missive, most elaborately headed, "11, Queen's Road, West Chelsea, Sunday, 26th" ("April, 1874," being postmarked on the envelope). It is addressed to his friend, Joseph Crawhall, of Newcastle, to whom he was indebted for many a "Punch" subject:

"I send you a pretty little piece of music that we used to make my sister's children sing when they were little—four tiny trebles in a row in unison. Are your olive-branches young? Try it with them, and if it does not give you a pleasant goose-fleshy sensation and a lump in your throat 'it's a pity!' Have you any fancy in the canine way? I've a little German dachshund . . . quiet, affectionate little animal, always sniffing about for mice, and such small deer; I fancy just the companion for an angler. She killed a tame pigeon of ours, though, this week, when our backs were turned. That reminds me of a bulldog that a friend of mine had, that killed every cat he came across; but he had been made to understand he was to spare the family mouser, and my friend says he often sees Tiger staring at her, and the water running out of his mouth!"

Here is another Crawhall fragment written five years later:

"I thought of you the other night when I called on my friend Haydon. . . . He's the staunchest angler I know south of you. He lives in Bedlam—don't be alarmed; he is steward of that celebrated establishment, and has a house with large garden in the precincts. He had hatched, and I helped

him to bottle off, several thousand young trout to put into a stream near Powderham Castle, Devonshire. Long may it ripple on, and Coquet and the rest, unpoisoned. To parody Lord John Manners' couplet,

Let industries and manufactures die,  
But leave us still our trout and salmon fry!

Passing strange, to stock a Devonshire stream with fish reared in the heart of Southwark, within stink of Bermondsey!"

To give some notion of the writer, letters ought to flow like common conversation; not phrasing with fine periods, but seeming like his usual talk. Simple as his nature was, Keene was never stiff or stilted; and though he read largely and thought deeply, he rarely let his tongue or pen be weighted by great words. It being his business to be humorous with his pencil, it became his practice to look for comical incidents, as affording proper subjects for his weekly work. So his letters often tell of funny stories he had heard, or how his quaint fantastic fancy had been stirred by real facts. Here, for instance, is a passage from a letter which extends to nearly seven pages of the *Life*—the writer elsewhere owning his preference for long letters, and frequently prolonging his "bald, disjointed chat" to even greater lengths than this. Speaking of lawn-tennis, he observes:

"You should go in for this pastime. It suits me. I like a game that stretches the muscles thoroughly, or else one of utter physical quiet, such as chess. A dawdling sort of game sends me to sleep. Billiards make me yawn. But I forgot; you are a fisherman. That's a different thing. My Irish friend says he is always in a tremble with excitement the first day he has in the year. He is married now, and says his fishing is a good deal stopped! They were in great trouble about the first baby. It could not take milk, and was a poor emaciated little bantling; but I consoled him when he told me, and congratulated him on the chance he had got—that there was no drawing at all in the ordinary fat maggot of a baby; but here was an artist blessed with a nice anatomical bony infant, such as Albert Durer and the early German masters drew from, and gave such character to their Holy Families. I believe he took the hint, as I've heard he made no end of nude studies from it; and only just in time, as they say it is fattening."

Like the good old Vicar of Wakefield,

Keene was little of a traveller; and although his annual migrations were rather more prolonged than "from the blue bed to the brown," he certainly was not of very locomotive disposition. His visits to "Tig," as he called his country place—whose proper name was Tigbourne Cottage—were varied now and then by a pleasant stay in Suffolk with his friend Edwin Edwards, or, in later years, his friend Edward Fitzgerald. Now and then, too, he enjoyed a little yachting about the Eastern Coast, which he always dearly loved, even to the length of terming Ipswich "my native town," in a letter which laments the woeful changes that he noticed there. Twice he went to Rhineland, and as far as the Black Forest, which he liked to see in spring; and he likewise went to France, once travelling in company with the present writer, who remembers very well a pleasant little dinner in a Lilliputian first-floor chamber on the Boulevard, and a monster omelette soufflée, "commanded" for two only, which quite defied the appetites of three to fairly finish.

Paris was in this case merely taken as a stepping-stone towards St. Jean de Luz, which Charles Keene far preferred to the more fashionable Biarritz, admiring the old houses clustered round the old grey church, as well as the Basque peasants, marching upright and majestic before their sluggish oxen. His first French visit, made some fifteen years before, has been immortalised in "Punch" of September, 1856, where may be seen some lifelike sketches of himself and his companions. But although enjoying his small tours abroad, he cared little to extend them, preferring an occasional sea-trip to Aberdeen, where he was ever warmly welcomed by kind northern friends of his, and where he might freely vent and vaunt his passion for the bagpipes.

Although he was by nature not a migrant, this passion, it is stated, more than once compelled him to seek a change of studio. It seized him first in Baker Street, at No. 55, whither he had moved in 1863 from the stonemason's yard in Clipstone Street. Here it was that, four years later, he first learned to cry with Keats, but with a meaning slightly different:

O bagpipe, that didst steal my heart away!

the poet's passion being that of rage, while Keene's was pure affection.

Always prone to riding hard whatever

hobby he might mount, no sooner did Charles Keene conceive a liking for the bagpipes than he applied himself with zeal to master that instrument; and though he made a dummy chanter, whereon to practise fingering as he walked home after nightfall, his chamber practice was more audible, and "such harmonious madness" from his lips would flow, that at length the listening world besought that he would play beyond earshot of Baker Street. He bravely held his ground awhile, enamoured of his wind-bag as deeply as Titania of her long-eared weaver; but at length, in 1873, he packed his precious pipes—both bagpipes and tobacco pipes—and betook himself to No. 11 in the Queen's Road West, at Chelsea. Here he hired a couple of rooms in a "charming old house," as his biographer describes it, and we learn without much wonder that, like many another such, it since has been demolished, to make room for "street improvements," as the fashion is to call our ugly modern brick-and-mortar works.

Having here a larger stable for its housing, Keene gave a looser rein to his hobby of collecting ancient curiosities. Swords, spurs, old books, old boots, were hung around its walls, or huddled up haphazard among ancient ladies' costumes and modern rustic clothing. Wood-blocks and portfolios of prints lay heaped with printers' proofs and scraps of precious sketches on the few chairs or the floor, and faded silk and satin flounces were degradingly commingled with corduroys and clogs. A rusty bit or two of armour and a pair of iron gauntlets might likewise be discerned, if luckily the day were not too dark for their discovery; while conspicuous at all times was a headless wooden horse, with an old saddle which might serve as the model for a drawing, but which it would hardly have been easy or even safe to mount.

Although in point of curio-hunting they were somewhat multifarious, in the way of food Keene's tastes were always very simple. Perhaps this may account in some slight measure for his not valuing overmuch his weekly privilege of dining with his good friend Mr. Punch. A bit of bacon for his breakfast, dried well-nigh to a cinder, was usually followed by a morsel of fruit pie; and, not finding at Chelsea a good hostelry at hand, he dined mostly at his studio on a mess of Irish stew, kept simmering for hours over a gas jet. In place of pudding he be-

smeared a slice of bread with jam, which, he frequently contended, gave great relish to a pipe. He drank nothing with his dinner, but made himself some coffee afterwards; and then for a while resumed the reading which was usual while he breakfasted or dined. Then he worked till nearly midnight, always trudging home to Hammersmith to sleep, and never taking an umbrella or a hansom when it rained.

Meanwhile his relish for the bagpipes showed no sign of diminution. Ever eager in research of things of ancient date, he amassed so many specimens of this amazing weapon (as its enemies may term it), that his collection was, for art's sake, exhibited at South Kensington in 1874, and has been honoured by a notice in Sir George Grove's comprehensive "Dictionary of Music." Many of Keene's letters written at this period bear witness to the growth of his "new musical vagary," as he called it. In one of them he mentions an enthusiast who was wont to practise piping after nightfall in Hyde Park; and he adds, with a pang of envy, "I wish I had the cheek to do that." Frequently he speaks with pride of the curious old pibrochs he had luckily picked up. Once he tells of "a set with very small drones, so that they sound like a nest of hornets buzzing an accompaniment!" And then he exclaims gaily, "That must be very jolly!" Again he writes, with some contempt, of a friend who had "thrown over strings, and taken violently to the flute—wants to get up a quartette of four of 'em in my rooms! I'm indifferent hardy, but I fancy I should like to have an extra flannel shirt to sit in such a thorough draught!" Yet he seems never fearful of the blasts from his own windbag. Indeed, such was his zealous industry in "skirling," that, had he been a pupil in the old Skye Piper's College, he would probably have learned to finger the "Piobaireachd" in far less than the seven years allowed for that accomplishment, and would have proved to be a prizeman at all collegiate contests.

In the year 1879 Charles Keene removed to his last studio, which likewise was in Chelsea, at No. 239 in the King's Road. "Awful difficult number to remember—no clue," he complains to his friend Crawhall; and, to show his want of memory, he puts the 3 before the 2, so that the answer to his letter goes astray to 329. Here he went on working hard and playing as before, his play being chiefly confined to his dear

pipes. "The love of music (and the pipes) is a part of my life," he declares to his friend Crawhall, while prattling of his flint-lore and fads about old china, at "page fifteen and I've not done yet!" of a long letter begun in May and ended in November, 1876. Sometimes for a change he took up a new instrument, or it would be more true to say another very old one; for new things never suited his fantastic taste. Thus he practised the recorder, which now is well-nigh obsolete, although in Hamlet's time it seemed in favour at the Court. And in the Jubilee Year we find him writing: "I'm very much wrapped up in a book of Irish tunes just now, and mean to go in seriously for the penny whistle—bought a tutor to-day." Strings, too, as well as wind-pipes were included in his playing; for a friend who tells of taking a long country walk with Keene, and then coming home to tea with him at "Tig," describes his sitting "in shirt-sleeves on the sill of the wide-open window, twanging a guitar and looking the picture of perfect happiness."

Nor were his musical proclivities confined to instrumental practice. Being naturally gifted with a good bass voice, he availed himself of any teaching he could get to cultivate the gift. The present writer well remembers singing with him publicly at certain early Handel Festivals, as well as privately at sundry social gatherings of a Glee Club, where the festival, as a rule, was less early than late. Keene, too, was a member of the famous Leslie Choir, and of the scarce less famous and far merrier Moray Minstrels, who, in 1858, first started in favour at a private house in Jermyn Street, and thence had the good fortune to be called the Jermyn Band.

In the spring of 1881 Keene lost the good mother who had sold his first drawings, and thus had given him a start in his artistic life. She died peacefully at Hammersmith at the ripe age of eighty-three; and (the interval excepted when he had lodged in Bloomsbury) Charles, her eldest son, had lived with her throughout his whole life. Affectionate of heart, though not demonstrative in tenderness, he felt the parting bitterly; as may be gathered from a letter which bears date "May 6th," the day she died: "I took my watch this morning as usual from twelve to five a.m., and after getting a little sleep I was called up again. I could not feel her pulse; she drew a few breaths calmly; another—she was gone! I can't

write any more just now, but my heart is lighter now she is released from her pain."

His own good health began to fail him not long after this. In April, 1883, he writes to his friend Crawhall: "Four weeks ago, walking home, I felt what I thought was 'heart-burn,' a pain in my chest that made me roar again. I thought it was indigestion, but I've had it ever since—that is, when I've walked about five hundred yards it begins." And in the following October he complains of being "groggy on my pins—lame as a kitten," as I heard a 'bus-driver express it, though why 'a kitten' I can't guess." Shortly afterwards he finds his usual weekly work for "Punch" is more than he can manage, without hurt to his health. "I'm pegging away," he writes in 1884, "but I find myself a 'barren rascal,' with only one subject a week to do, and wonder how it was that formerly I could accomplish two."

Little as they were, his love for "fairly pipes"\* had doubtless greatly damaged his habitual good health. He still went on, however, working at his studio, and walking to and fro some six or eight miles daily, for he still lived at Hammersmith. He was always a good walker; indeed, the love of marching, perhaps, had chiefly moved him, in 1859, to join the Volunteers. His long legs and spare frame were well adapted for such exercise; and even when past sixty he could tramp a score of miles without being overtired. He kept up his dancing, too, another of his delights, until his mother's death. In 1876 he writes to Crawhall: "I'm a useful hack waltzer for my age"; and it is not till 1884 that we find the sad avowal: "I was at a dance the other night for the first time in my life without tripping it"; the writer being then in his sixty-second year.

Although not much of a player, he took greatly to lawn-tennis, rather late in life; and later still to golf, which he likewise failed to master.

But the foul fiend Nicotine put ere very long a sudden end to such delights. Acute dyspepsia set in, with sharp rheumatic seizures, compelling the poor sufferer to give up well-nigh wholly his daily work

\* Otherwise called "plague pipes," and believed to have been used for medicinal herb-smoking ere tobacco was discovered. Keene always used these little ancient pipes, and his letters often mention them. "I have found several myself between high and low water at Richmond," he writes to Mr. Crawhall; and to show how fond he was of them he adds: "I very often dream that I'm by a river with sandy banks, and picking up these pipes by hundreds!"



and walks. In July, 1889, he pictures, with grim humour, "My shrunkn thighs, hollow and wrinkled with the loss of fat . . . put me in mind of Albert Durer's 'Anatomies';" and in the next month he announces that he has begun to clear the "ket" (Northumbrian for "lumber") he had gathered in his studio; and he adds, with plaintive pathos: "It 'gars me grue' rather. It says FINIS so forcibly."

Strangely enough, as it may seem, a perfect horror of tobacco had attacked him in the spring; and poor Charles Keene without his pipe was about as great a sufferer as an elephant with the earache or a giraffe with a sore throat. "The tobacco taste has not come back yet," he complained in July, and confesses "that's one reason I dread going into the country. What are you to do there if you can't smoke?" In December, likewise, he still laments his pipeless fate: "I have still the distaste for tobacco, and can no longer quote the stanza from my old friend Percival Leigh's 'Ode to Mrs. Grundy' in 'Punch,' years ago:

Grandeur sinking,  
Never thinking,  
If your censure I provoke,  
Oft a cutty  
Pipe with smutty  
Bowl along the road I smoke!"

On New Year's Day, however, he seems a jot more cheerful: "I'm much better, I hope, as I've enjoyed a longer immunity from pain than hitherto all the year. . . . I take a whiff of tobacco, too, of an evening, which is a good sign." But the 'bacco-phobia came again to haunt him in the spring, when he suddenly was startled to find his feet and ankles swollen. "An ominous and disheartening symptom," he writes sadly, "which promises to confine me more than ever. In short I cannot conceal from myself that I am 'broken down' at present—a stranded wreck."

So until the year's end he mournfully lives on; his last "Punch" cut appearing in August—although drawn a while before—and the last touch of his pencil being given in the autumn to a sketch of his old Dachshund, done to the very life as she lay after death. And on the fourth of January—the first Sunday of the New Year 1891—her gentle master, too, lay dead. Nor was it unlike his tender-hearted nature that one of the last things he said was, on hearing there was deep snow on the ground, "Oh, what will the little birds do?"

On the following Saturday he was buried

at the Hammersmith Cemetery, in presence of many of his relatives and friends, including most of his "Punch" colleagues; and on the second of February his old chums the Moray Minstrels met to sing a solemn requiem in his honour, the company all standing in deep silence till its close.

That Charles Keene was a great artist is now generally acknowledged, and it is not within our province to criticise his work. "Nature made him an artist," says his biographer most truly, "circumstances a humorous one"—though they but shaped the sense of humour which was his natural gift. To compare him with John Leech appears both idle and invidious; for each in his own sphere was admittedly supreme. Keene had not the versatility of Leech, who was as great as a cartoonist as he was in social "cuts," and could draw from memory whatever he had seen. His pictures of the hunting-field were such as he alone could do; and possibly some thought of them may have been in Keene's mind when, in November, 1876, he thus summed up in one sentence all his modest wants and wishes: "If ever I should get months of leisure and liberty, I wonder if I shall have the pluck to set about what I would if I had them now—to draw horses and riders from life, to make bagpipe reeds, and to find a place where I could play the great pipes for six weeks without being heard, and finally conquer them."

Keene, too, had less invention than had Leech, so far at least as finding his "Punch" subjects was concerned. Both of them were most acute observers of Nature, but Keene was the more careful in carrying a sketch-book ready to his hand. "I never could do any work without a foundation from nature," he affirms; although the statement is scarce warranted by his whimsical initial letters, and his charming fancy portraits of his old friend Mr. Punch. He declined to see a difference between figure-scenes and landscapes, as far as regarded any obstacles in treatment. "If a man can draw, he can draw anything," he would say; and certainly the lovely bits of scenery which surround his rustic figures may be cited in support of the axiom he laid down. "Draw a thing as you see it," was another of his maxims; which, indeed, he often personally followed, stopping in the street to make a study of a crossing-sweeper, or to draw from life a sausage manufacturer, or rapidly to sketch some passing incident or oddity that chanced to catch his eye. Ever quick

to seize a likeness, he jotted down, as types, such figures as might strike him; and hence come in no small measure, the vigour of his drawings, and the wondrous "go" and movement and aptitude of attitude for which they are so famed.

A hard worker himself, Keene never failed to advocate the need of honest industry to ensure success.

"What do you mean," he asks a friend, "that you have been working, but without success? Do you mean that you cannot get the price you ask? Then sell it for less, till, by practice, you shall improve, and command a better price. Or do you only mean that you are not satisfied with your work? Nobody ever was that I know, except J—— W——. Peg away! While you're at work you must be improving. . . . Do something from Nature indoors when you cannot get out, to keep your hand and eye in practice. Don't get into the way of working too much at your drawings away from Nature."

Where would a beginner look for better counsel? Could Raphael or Titian, could Ruysdael, Claude, or Turner, if advising a young artist, have used wiser words than these?

Lover as he was of Nature, Keene was seldom tempted into caricature. There is no trace in his drawings of the ugliness of Rowlandson, the coarseness of Gillray, or the antics of George Cruickshank. Fond of humour as he was, he never let it tempt him to unnatural extravagance, or to the slightest deviation from purity and truth. Nor was there any trait of jealousy in his artistic temper. Always the first to welcome the good work of another, he was the last to recognise the merits of his own. In the spring of 1878 he writes: "A couple of frames of my 'Punch' sketches have gone to Paris, sent by a friend of mine, and I'll back them to be the cheekiest specimens of art in the whole International. I could not have had the face to send them myself." The drawings were, however, largely praised by Paris artists; and in the following Exhibition, held there in 1889, Charles Keene was one of the few Englishmen to whom the highest honour was awarded for their work. How little he was proud of it, and possibly how much it may have shocked his modesty, may be gathered from a letter in October of that year: "That award from Paris was rather a surprise to me, as I had forgotten I had anything there. I did not send anything myself, but my friend Mr. Edwards

contributed some. It is a queer arrangement. They send you a cast, gilt I believe, and if you wish for the gold medal—proper—you can buy it for a price! I don't think I shall invest!"

But although France was the first country to recognise officially the genius of Charles Keene, England, his own native land, did not long lag behind—only here, it must be owned, the official recognition was deferred until his death. Speaking at the banquet of the Royal Academy in May, '91, the President paid a very just, though a rather tardy, tribute to the memory of "that delightful artist and unsurpassed student of character," who, however, had never been distinguished by the privilege of adding the initials R.A. to his name. "Never," declared Sir Frederick Leighton, speaking in his sweetest and distinctest tones, "never have the humours of the life of certain classes of Englishmen been seized with such unerring grasp as in his works; never have they been arrested with a more masterly artistic skill. Among the documents for the study of future days of middle-class and of humble English life, none will be more weighty than the vivid sketches of this great humorist."

In these days of hurry-scurry scramble, and restlessness, and rush, it is refreshing to be told of a person like Charles Keene, who was placidly content to lead a quiet life. Nor is it less pleasant, in this progressive era of monotonous humanity, to come across an individual who differed from the crowd. Men now mostly are machine-made in their colleges and costumes, their customs and their clubs. Keene was an exception to the rule of the majority. Without the faintest thought or fancy of displeasing other people, he had the sense and strength of mind to live precisely as he liked. His life was a fair protest to the fashionable doctrine, begotten of Mrs. Grundy, that a man who lives in London, if he would be esteemed a gentleman, must wear always a tall hat. This he bravely never did; and although his plain, grey shooting-suit might shock the swell Sartocracy who haunt "the shady side of Pall Mall" and the parks, it rather served to stir the envy of his own less daring friends.

Pure of heart and life; kindly in his nature and simple in his tastes; a loving son and brother, and a true and steadfast friend; untiring in his work, yet heedless of its fame; a most undoubted genius, yet a most contented man—it can hardly be

gainsaid that, uneventful though it was, his life was well worth living, and, indeed, worth writing. And although we may not hope to imitate his talents, yet in his purity, and modesty, and absolute unworldliness, we may truly wish we were more like Charles Keene.

## THE LATE MRS. VERNON.

By A. MOBERLY.

*Author of "Lady Valeria," etc., etc.*

### CHAPTER VII.

MURIEL held me close in her arms, and her pretty head dropped on my shoulder. "Did I startle you?" she asked; "I am so sorry, but I couldn't help it. Miles was to have come in first to prepare you, but when I saw you looking so sad and lonely, sitting here by yourself, I couldn't wait another minute. Oh! what a nice place to cuddle!" and she nestled in closer. "Darling, darling," she murmured. How was I to silence her?

Looking up in sore perplexity, I found Colonel Fortescue standing by us, twirling his grey moustache agitatedly. His eyes shone, and he winked very hard once or twice, and then turned sharply away and walked to the window.

"What shall I do?" I cried despairingly. "Oh, Muriel, Muriel, don't call me 'mother.' How you will hate me some day!"

"No, I shan't," said Muriel, with an energetic hug; "that I never shall. I won't call you 'mother' if you don't like it." She went on after a few minutes' consideration, "I'll give in to you there. The fact is, it is too late in life for me to begin as a daughter. I shouldn't know how to behave. What shall we call her, Miles? Léonie? No! you don't like that either, I know. I shall call you 'Madam'—that commits me to nothing. 'Madam' you shall be, when I don't call you 'darling'—I deliver this as my act and deed," and she dropped yet another kiss on my forehead.

I felt myself blush and tremble like a young girl with her lover. It was all so new, so bewilderingly sweet and strange, this pet name—these caresses. When had I ever been anything but "Miss Margison" in my life? Miss Margison! the name seemed charged with suggestions of

slates and sums, grimy tasks of hemming and scanty schoolroom tea. Once, indeed, one of the Tarrant boys home for the holidays had greeted me with "Hallo, Betsey!" and though his father wished to punish him, I readily forgave the indignity. The babies had lain in my arms and put up soft little hands to my wan face, but as they grew up had turned away from me when I had no longer time to pet and play with them.

All this seemed to come into my mind in a flash, while Muriel's pretty head still rested on my shoulder and her slender girlish fingers held mine tight.

"How did you come here?" I faltered.

"Oh, we managed that capitally," she laughed. "Miles—he is a monster of duplicity you know—is always running down to his cottage in Hertfordshire: is it for shooting or fishing?—I declare I don't know. At any rate it is close to our school, and he deludes that poor misguided Lady Principal into such a state of blind confidence that I am allowed to spend every Saturday afternoon with him, or even to come up to town for the day—under charge of a governess, you understand—she looks upon him in fact as a sort of uncle or guardian."

"My dear, I am your father's oldest friend."

"I wouldn't bring that forward as a recommendation," Muriel retorted with a look of bitter contempt that made me start.

"Muriel!" exclaimed Colonel Fortescue sternly, but she only tossed her head and ran on.

"To-day, by good luck, it was Fräulein Schmidt's turn to go on duty, so I at once demanded to be taken to the Doré pictures and the National Gallery. She's as blind as a bat and hates Art, so we connived at her desertion till five o'clock, and she is off for a happy day with some German kindred while Miles brought me here to welcome home my darling!"

I put her clasping hands aside and rose trembling to my feet.

"Have you not had my letter, Colonel Fortescue? I sent it two days ago."

"Did you? I have been down in Hertfordshire since I saw you, except for a few hours in town the day before yesterday. There was much to explain and arrange," with a glance at Muriel, "and I had another reason, which I will tell you presently, for not coming to see you. We

must have a long talk on business before I leave."

"May I take off my hat and jacket?" Muriel demanded, "I feel so untidy."

I was weak enough to let the interruption check the words on my lips, and we left the room together hand in hand. As I closed the door I could not help turning for another look at the tall figure in the window, and caught one in return, so bright, so tender, so well-content, it pierced my heart like a knife-thrust. When we were alone together Muriel flung off her wraps, and seizing my hands gazed once more into my face with a keen, long, searching look, under which my eyes dropped and I trembled.

"You are just the mother I wanted to have," she announced deliberately. "I haven't known whether to be frightened or glad since I heard you were coming. Miles—isn't he a splendid old fellow?—and Fräulein thought me mad this morning, I was laughing or crying all the way up. Oh, if you only knew what it has been like, all these horrid long lonely years; I was worse off than any orphan in the school, though I had a home and two living parents."

"Did you miss your mother so?" I murmured, holding the pretty clinging creature tight in my arms.

"Miss you? Every day of my life. Such a baby I was to be sent from one school to another—I believe now just to prevent your trying to see me. I should have died if it had not been for the pleasure of fighting with Aunt Honor. I hated her, poor thing. I didn't know how much worse I should have been without her—that she stood between me and Mr. Vernon."

"Mr. Vernon?"

"I don't call him 'father'—not likely! I'm under no delusions respecting him you may be sure. He has just begun to act the tender parent, and he does it so badly. I haven't quarrelled with him; where was the use? He had it in his power to make life very hard to me till you came to deliver me. He's a bad man. Even Miles couldn't deny it when I said so, and Miles is one of those who would find a good word to say for the Devil himself if the world was going against him."

"My dear!" I cried, rather scared.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. It was a remark of Bertie's that I quoted unconsciously. It is a relief to put things strongly now and then. Why, Miles him-

self—if you'd heard him swear when I told him about Sir Claude Levison! It did me good! It was just what I wanted to say myself."

"And who is Sir Claude Levison, and the other gentleman—Bertie I think you called him?"

She looked at me with comic dismay. "Hasn't Miles told you? Have we to begin at the very beginning of everything? We shall never get through by luncheon."

She began hastily to try and twist and pull her soft thick coils of hair into place. I pushed her gently into a chair, and took out a dainty lace-trimmed wrapper of her mother's to throw over her shoulders, then shook down her dusky locks and took up the brush. She laughed softly at herself in the glass, and caught my hand to kiss it as it passed. I looked at her too, with a strange, secret, greedy rapture over her grace and sweetness. Why was this not mine by right, this love, these caresses, this clinging bright creature? Why must I put it all away from me and give it up to a dead woman who was past all joy? What could she do for the child? What help could she be?

"Mother, I am like you!" Muriel cried. "I was always an ugly black and white imp, and you were a distinguished beauty—even Aunt Honor admitted that; but we are alike."

I looked at the two faces wistfully. Muriel's was like her mother's, except for the mouth and chin, which were firm and full of character. Mrs. Vernon's had borne traces of past loveliness, and Muriel's was full of the promise of beauty to come, and between theirs and mine was but the superficial resemblance of pale skin, dark hair, and shadowy eyes. I shook my head and went on with my pretty task, blessing the years of apprenticeship that I had served to Mrs. Tarrant.

"How nice you make me look. What will Miles think when he sees me? Isn't he a dear old knight errant? I should have died years ago if it had not been for him. He found me out and cheered me up over and over again; but it was I thought of sending for you, and I stuck to it even when Miles and the lawyer looked at one another and shook their heads, and said: 'The best possible thing if Mrs. Vernon could be induced to come forward, but——' 'She will come forward,' I said, and I wrote to you twice. Did you never get those letters?"

"Never."



"There, I knew they were stopped somehow! I was sure of it! And Miles got so angry, he started off once and followed you to Paris to have it out and set things right, and you wouldn't see him, and left next morning without his knowing. But it's all right now," triumphantly, "and now come and hear about Bertie."

Colonel Fortescue was awaiting our return patiently. He threw down his newspaper, and rose to place me a chair with a perfectly radiant face.

"The child was wisest of us all, you see."

"Bertie and I," amended Muriel.

"I should like to hear about Bertie, if you please."

Colonel Fortescue's eyes twinkled.

"Bertie? Why, he's her latest doll. A pretty little boy."

"An officer in Her Majesty's service," indignantly from Muriel on the hearth-rug at my feet.

"A dear little midshipmite out on a holiday. They have been playing at sweethearts together."

"You'll find it earnest. He'll get his promotion next June, and then——"

Here the door swung open and the maid announced, "Mr. Bertram Gordon," and I rose to receive a bronzed, curly-haired lad, who stood smiling in the doorway.

"Mrs. Vernon!" he cried, his eyes sparkling, and his strong hand clasping mine warmly. "I hardly expected it. It seemed too good to be true," looking into my face with his bright blue eyes, while he shook my hand again and again. "It's altogether too good to be true," he repeated, with a glance at Muriel that I felt meant a great deal.

"It is true," she answered him. "I couldn't enter into explanations on a post-card, and that was all Miles would allow me to write. Here she is safe, and she is ready to help us all she can, I know. Oh, Bertie, Bertie!"

Mr. Bertram Gordon had given up shaking my hand by this time, and had caught both Muriel's in his, looking ecstatically at her.

"Have you told her?" he asked softly.

"N—not quite. We have been trying. You tell," she whispered.

She was quite another Muriel now; a shyer, more dignified young person, who withdrew one hand with the faintest of blushes, but failed to release the other.

He drew her closer, and spoke out boldly.

"I have asked Muriel to be my wife, Mrs. Vernon, and she says it must depend on your consent and my father's. I dare say you won't think me good enough for her, but I love her with all my heart, and I'll try to deserve her with all my might, and I'll make her happier than any other fellow could do if I die for it. That's all I have to say."

Such a pair of children they looked, despite his brave words and Muriel's quaint, gracious air of approval. Both were silent, looking anxiously to me—to me, Heaven help them!—for sanction or encouragement.

"What can I do? What is to be done! Oh, my poor children, I am of all women most helpless and unfortunate!" I began weakly but Colonel Fortescue laid his hand gently on my arm and spoke for me.

"You must not press for an answer now. Remember all this has come upon her without a word of preparation. We'll tell the whole story presently. Now I shall ring for luncheon."

#### CHAPTER VIII.

COLONEL FORTESCUE was responsible for that sumptuous little repast of course. I felt strange and awkward in my novel position as hostess, with three such guests round my gay flower-decked table, but my deficiencies passed unnoticed. I was treated as an invalid, petted, waited on, cheered and made much of. The two children jested and laughed and bestowed a hundred small confidences on me. Colonel Fortescue was unusually silent, bent on effacing himself it seemed. I divined that I had to make my own way as best I could with Muriel and her lover, but nevertheless I felt the strength and support of his presence all through. Now and then I caught a confidential glance or smile of satisfaction as he contemplated the two young people opposite. They made a bonnie pair, and their demeanour to one another was perfect, even in my prim old-maidish opinion. I felt myself giving way to the influences of the moment. My confession was made and off my mind. It was safe in Colonel Fortescue's hands, and sooner or later he was bound to know the truth, but this hour was my own.

We drew round the fire afterwards with an air of beginning business in earnest, Muriel settling herself on my footstool with

a plateful of sweets in her lap, which she discussed with frank schoolgirlish enjoyment.

"You had better tell your mother frankly and freely all there is to tell from the very first, Muriel—it's a long story," Colonel Fortescue said, glancing at his watch.

"Go back to the beginning of all things," said Muriel meditatively, picking up a marron glacé. "Let me see. There would never have been a beginning at all if it hadn't been for you, Miles."

"Me! my dear!" with a start of astonishment.

"Certainly. We owe our engagement to Colonel Fortescue, don't we, Bertie?"

"To Colonel Fortescue decidedly—or perhaps to Colonel Fortescue's friends in Malta," responded Bertram promptly, "they may have had something to do with it."

"And possibly the measles," Muriel admitted after reflection.

They told me the story amongst them somehow. It did begin with the measles after all. An epidemic broke out near the school, and Muriel was attacked and moved to the Sanatorium, followed by two little Indian children, and lastly by Mrs. Vipont, the Lady Principal, herself. The rest of the school escaped, and the four invalids went to complete their convalescence at Brighton.

"And we hadn't been there a week before the poor Lady Prince was down with bronchitis," explained Muriel, "and our maid took to going out to the Aquarium every evening with a soldier, leaving me to put the children to bed, and Dottie had an earache every night, and Flossie cried for her ayah, and Mrs. Vipont mustn't be worried and wouldn't let me write for her sister to come, and I really think my mind gave way a little before I sent for Miles. I do not consider myself responsible for any rash action I may have committed at that time."

"You would have been proud of her," Colonel Fortescue declared. "She kept them all alive, nursed the poor lady and mothered those fretful little monkeys, and only wrote to me just as she was breaking down herself. Of course I set off at once."

"Quite forgetting"—Bertram continued the story—"that he had strictly ordered me not to sail without seeing him, and had promised me introductions to his friends at Malta. When I came up to town to dine with him at his club by special appointment, there he was not, and there was nothing

for it but to pursue him to Brighton. Fortunately he had left his address. I got to the hotel and was shown up to his room. It was getting late and the room was in semi-darkness. As I opened the door a female figure sprang forward, I was closely embraced by a pair of young and lovely arms, and kisses were showered upon me mingled with tender reproaches for my long delay. It was gratifying, though meant for another."

Muriel looked up scared, then burst into a laugh. "That spoilt little wretch, Dottie Lyons! Yes, Miles had asked those children to tea in his room to play with his big dog, and I was to go for a drive with him first. Of course they had come half an hour too soon. Don't I remember the orgie we found going on when we returned—cards and empty bottles strewn about!"

"Only lemonade. They were so thirsty, and you had kept us so long waiting for our tea. The four of us—counting the collie, he took a hand—had got through five games of 'Old Maid,' and the doom fell on me each time."

"So there you have it," continued Colonel Fortescue. "I couldn't send the fellow back to town by the next train, nor could I desert Muriel in her distress. I thought three days of him could do no harm—I didn't know the ways of Jack ashore—and that he would be sent off on a reasonable sort of a cruise for a year or two. I never expected to have him back again in six months, following me down to Hertfordshire to see if I could give him any fishing, making excuses for calling on Mrs. Vipont, playing Romeo under the windows—"

"Mother," whispered Muriel very softly, leaning a hot cheek against me, "you don't suppose that I could help it. You don't think that I behaved as nice girls—girls with homes and mothers to consult—might not have done?"

Bertram caught her shamefaced look without hearing what she said, but I loved him for his instant comprehension of her trouble. "Romeo, indeed! More like the young man who died for cruel Barbara Allen," he declared. "That is why I've wanted you to come home and stand my friend, Mrs. Vernon. Not a crumb of encouragement could I get from any one."

"And what do you expect me to do for you?" I asked him rather timidly.

"I hoped you might see my father. He has never refused me anything before in

his life, and I thought if he knew—if the case were put plainly before him——” His fluency seemed to desert him, he glanced at Muriel and grew redder with every word. Then he stopped short and turned to Colonel Fortescue. “I’ve been taken by surprise, you know. I never heard of Mrs. Vernon’s return till I got Muriel’s card this morning, and have not thought out what I want to say to her. Had I not better write? I know I shall blunder into something that ought not to be said if I go on now; or would you explain?”

Colonel Fortescue seemed to understand his difficulty. “We can go into all that presently. Mrs. Vernon is quite clear as to your position I am sure. It is Muriel’s that we have to consider first. She is, as perhaps you know, most unfortunately a great heiress.”

Muriel heaved a pathetic sigh and finished her sweets.

“Her aunt Miss Honor Vernon’s large fortune has come to her, or will come when she is of age. Meanwhile her maintenance and education are handsomely provided for through me and the other trustee. Mr. Vernon is strictly debarred from touching the money under any pretext.”

“Hence all these woes,” interposed Muriel. “If she had but left him a chance of embezzling it comfortably I should be a free and happy pauper in a year or two; whereas now he will have to make away with me as well as my money. I am a valuable article at his disposal, and he will trade me away for what I will fetch—to Sir Claude Levison, unless some one makes a higher bid. Don’t swear, Bertie! That’s no practical assistance. Why are you looking so shocked, Miles? Is there any use in keeping up a pretence of filial piety for mother’s benefit? She knows what Mr. Vernon is better than any one can tell her. She would only despise me if I declared I loved and honoured him.” The girl spoke with the pitiless straightforwardness of her age, and nestled down against me quite composedly when she had said her say.

“Muriel has put the case strongly—I wish I could say unfairly,” Colonel Fortescue said gravely. “Her father made no attempt even to see her while Miss Vernon was alive, but lately he has been going down to the school and insisting on taking her out to drive with him, and Mrs. Vipont has received notice of his

intention to take her from the school at the end of this term.”

“But you won’t let me go!” cried Muriel, looking up with a frightened face.

“You mustn’t let me go to him!”

“Never!” shouted Bertie. “My father must and shall give his consent to our marriage, or we’ll do without it. I am ready to throw up my profession to-morrow and carry her away to the ends of the earth rather than that blackguard shall lay a finger on her.”

“Gently, gently, my dear boy. Don’t speak that way of her father, leave him to me. I can make Tom Vernon hear reason, and as for that scoundrel Levison, I would kill him with my own hands before I would let him—bah! what nonsense we are talking!”

He stopped, and Muriel’s clear girlish laugh broke the pause like a saucy bird’s chirrup in a thunderstorm.

“What queer things men are! Marriage for me or murder for poor Sir Claude. Are those your best plans? Why, I made up a dozen better in the train while we were coming up to town. Here’s one. Can’t I go mad?”

“We have no time for joking, Muriel,” Colonel Fortescue said sternly.

“Mad,” repeated she undaunted. “You get two doctors to examine me, you know, and you’ll see what they say. I’ll be dangerous and violent if you like—anything to get them to lock me up in some nice asylum out of harm’s way. They will keep me there till I’m one-and-twenty. Bertie will be an Admiral or First Lieutenant or something by that time, and you can get me out again.”

“Four years of an asylum! You would probably be a lunatic in earnest by that time. I would rather consider one of your other eleven expedients first.”

“Well, then, who’s the other trustee?”

“Mr. Alexander Brownlow, of Great St. Helen’s.”

“Can’t we get at him and persuade him to turn fraudulent? I’ll make it all good to him somehow. Can’t he invest this wretched money in some swindling company, or gamble it away on the Stock Exchange? Mother and I could have a dear little cottage together, and Miles would come and see us.”

“I am afraid Mr. Brownlow is incorruptible. What of the other ten suggestions?”

“We must drive a bargain with Sir Claude himself.” She was speaking in

earnest now. "We must buy them off—it can be done. See him. Ask his price, I'll pay it gladly; and make him promise to deal with Mr. Vernon—he can manage him if he chooses. Promise them all the plunder if nothing else will serve. Don't trouble about me, I can work. I'll make bonnets—I should like that; or I'll go as house-parlourmaid. I'm tall, I wear no fringe, I don't want followers. Go and arrange it, Miles. I'll sign a bond, or back a bill, or circumvent the lawyers in any way he pleases. Tell him he'd be better off with the money and without me. I won't marry him without raising such a scandal as never has been heard of."

Muriel's voice was quiet, but her face was very white and her eyes looked wicked. "He must marry me by force," she repeated slowly, "and then I shall kill myself and most likely kill him first. Oh, Bertie!" with an instantaneous change of look and tone, "don't look so horrified! You know it is only when I think of you that I grow desperate." She sprang to her feet, dismayed by the storm of wrath and passion in his fair boyish face, and slid her hand in his arm, leaning her cheek against his shoulder; but he drew away from her and walked to the window, where he rested his arm against the frame and his forehead on his arm, engaged in a silent struggle for self-control, poor boy. "Help us, Miles! What are we to do?" she asked in a choked voice.

"Nothing heroic. My suggestion is a very commonplace one after all. We must make you a ward in Chancery. I haven't a notion how to set about it, but the lawyers can tell us. I don't even know whether I could have moved in the matter,

but there can be no question of your mother's right to interfere. That will be another advantage to us of her presence here, but we must lose no time. Shall you feel equal to an interview with Mr. Fairbrother, my man of business, on Monday?" he asked, turning to me. "I wish I need not hurry you so, but every hour is of moment. It is a great point that your husband never suspects that you are in England—or I think not. Your name was only mentioned once in the newspaper accounts of that accident, and Tom never reads anything but the sporting intelligence. But we must be careful—very careful."

I was busy watching the pair in the window, and he stopped to look too. Muriel had laid her cheek against Bertram's sleeve, and was murmuring some soft half-jesting little nonsense, lifting her witching eyes now and then to his. His face was still set and wrathful, but he seemed to yield like a child who is half ashamed of being coaxed out of a fit of naughtiness. We saw her open the window and slip out, and I jumped up in a small maternal flutter of anxiety, thinking of the chill evening air, and hurried to fetch her hat and coat. She laughed at me, and protested and kissed me, regardless of public observation. There was no one to see us except a single sauntering figure in the distance, whom as he drew near I recognised, with a start and a thought of Kitty, as "the man in the fur coat." Before I could even make sure of him he had hailed a passing hansom and was gone, and the lovers had the street to themselves.

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The Terms to Subscribers having their Copies sent direct from the Office: Weekly Numbers, 10s. 10d. the Year, including postage; and Monthly Parts, 12s. 6d.

Post Office Orders should be made payable to ALBERT SEYMOUR, 12, St. Bride Street, Ludgate Circus, E.C.

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